

The evening meal is always notable for the number planning to consume it. Its proportions expand as little titbits that had been hidden for such an occasion appear from the bottom of each knapsack. The blueberries and raspberries at your feet abound in such numbers that even if half of them are eaten in the picking process there are more than enough for a delicious dessert.

You might call it experimental cooking with good cause. Trip menus with peculiar sounding names are thoroughly tested, and although the cooks are not skilled in French cuisine, they prove themselves to be able assistants and organizers. The products are invariably palatable and the cooks' ravenous appetites soon became satisfied. Why these recipes lose some of their tangy flavour when attempted in the city is very puzzling. Perhaps it has something to do with that intangible ingredient Algonquin.

Who can resist a fire burning bright with knotty pine roots oozing sweet smelling pitch? It has such a magnetic power that canoes appear from almost nowhere on the lake as other counsellors join the group. The coffee pot is boiling to welcome them and the evening passes in songs and chatter. And somewhere in the blueberry patch, while gathering supplies for a homemade pie, the letters, the book and the laundry are forgotten; and actually they really didn't matter.



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## CHAPTER 12

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### *The Part of the Parents*

A CHILD'S PARENTS have a right to expect from camp certain benefits in the way of health, happiness, skills and friends. They may hope their child will gain a sense of responsibility, correct her posture, and get ahead with her swimming, or they may merely want her in a safe place where she will be happy while they go abroad. Nevertheless, the trust that parents placed in the camp when they sent their children to us was a continual challenge. In turn, we tried to look on each child from the parent's point of view and impress upon every counsellor that each one was the most important person in the world to someone. It was not a case of liking a child; that was not the point; we had to do much more. She was our responsibility for the summer. Sometimes a new camper might put one off by a "cover up" attitude that could alienate both counsellor and cabin mate. That had nothing to do with it either. She was our responsibility, and those of us who had learned to look through her faults and see her possibilities, soon found we not only liked her, we loved her. Some we failed, some we helped, but we did the best we knew for each one.

From dealing with all kinds of campers we learned a



great deal about the business of getting on with people. No camper ever corrected a fault merely because we focused our attention on that fault. If, however, we could learn to see the person she could be without that fault, the change in her was miraculous. We were to find that the idea worked with adults as well as children.

We were always glad to know that a child's parents were planning to visit her, and they were welcome any hour of the day, except during rest hour. We preferred this to having a special day for visitors. It was not disturbing to the campers as a whole and to the continuity of the programme, and the parents saw the camp in its natural, normal state. Also it gave counsellor and director a better opportunity to have a visit with the individual parents. The parents usually stayed to a meal with director and counsellor, and the camper brought some of her cabin mates to the same table.

The camper usually informed us of the intended visit at assembly. Sometimes mixed with the delight of the parents' visit was the horrible fear that father or mother might do the wrong thing. Perhaps mother would be too effusive in front of everyone, perhaps father would arrive with boxes of chocolates under his arm. How was she to tell him she could not have them, that they had to be shared with everybody? The day that should have been the most wonderful of the summer was often filled with apprehension that those they loved might commit some social error. It was a sort of a testing time, and happy was the camper whose parents realized this.

The children were very different in their reactions when parents visited. I remember one camper who, seeing her parent arrive on the dock, stretched out her arms and flew down the steps so fast that she ran right into the lake. On another occasion, when a parent put her elbows on the table, the child was mortified beyond words. She gently reached over and quickly flipped the elbows off the



table. The mother, though convulsed with laughter, admitted she had never had a more uncomfortable meal. But even the camper who was shy and silent when parents came took pride and delight in having them. It was evidence that to someone she was the most important person in the world and worth travelling miles to see. Through the winter when the camper talked of camp experiences it meant much more to all concerned if the parents had seen the camp in action and caught the spirit of it all.

At any rate the visit to camp was a very important event. Most of the parents came once in a season and we tried to make the visit a happy experience for everyone. Moreover, the parent had much vital information about the camper, and sharing this would help make the camper's experience of maximum value.

After the parents and cabin counsellor had met, there was a much deeper understanding on the part of the latter. She felt she had a definite part in the development of the child, and that the parents were looking to her for something she could provide through life at camp that they could not provide at home. It was a challenge that made the counsellor's work more effective.

Of course, the family and the camp have different objectives. The family is concerned mainly with the individual interests of the child, while the camp sees the child as a member of a group and seeks her adjustment to it.

The different objectives may create confusion in the mind of the child, and make the visit somewhat disrupting. It is the part of the director to make sure that the parents know the aims and objectives, the methods and procedures of the camp, by letter or by word of mouth, then the parent will be able to acquaint the camp with all it needs to know about the camper, and



help to perpetuate the gains the camper has made. Exchange of information between home and camp is important.

Camp is a child's world and it is very important that the child should feel at home with her own age group. The fact that she gets along at home, does not necessarily mean she can get along with her own contemporaries. In the child's world, to be acceptable to other children is essential to her happiness, and has a great influence on her behaviour. If, for instance, she does not do her part in keeping the cabin tidy, and her cabin mates resent it, their lack of approval hurts her. It does not take long for her to change her ways and do her part. Or there is the little sloucher; in all probability her parents have remonstrated with her many times, but the remonstrances have gone unheeded. The younger campers, in particular, take pride in their bearing and behaviour as a tribe in the dining-room. They usually formed a committee to check each other up in these matters and it did not take long for the one-time sloucher to improve her posture. We did not do it; the campers did. It is true, the campers learn about living from campers, but it needs a counsellor in the background to bring out the best. These are some of the ways in which a parent's hopes are realized.

A child learns more readily if she is free from worry and uncertainty. A failure to receive an expected letter is tragic to her. A letter a week from home is the average. At Tanamakoon the practice was to post, just before tea, a list of those receiving mail. After tea there was a general rush to the office. No one expected a letter daily, but the disappointment of a child whose name rarely appeared on the list was pathetic. A busy parent might not be aware of this, but letters played a big part in the campers' enjoyment of the summer.

I have often wondered if parents realized how much their children take to heart the contents of their letters.



The child's happiness is heightened tremendously by letters she receives, especially if they are cheerful and reveal an interest in her achievements. If the parent shows she is proud that the child has won a blue cap, it is important. On the other hand, though it is good for her to know she is being missed, letters telling of the gloom that has been spread over the house due to her absence, even to the gloom of the cat and the dog, cause homesickness. Soon she dissolves into tears and the homesickness spreads.

It is true, of course, that the parent should be able to count on a letter each week from the camper. This should be supplemented by an occasional letter from the counsellor or director to tell the parent of the health, happiness and progress of her child.

It had been my hope during the last few years of my time at Tanamakoon that we could bring together in the city, for discussion, parents of children belonging to the same age group. I still feel it would be most enlightening all around, and would give the parent her rightful chance to be a part of it all. I have found in the past that some of the most rewarding experiences as director have been in working with individual parents in acquiring an understanding of the camper.

It would be a breach of loyalty to give actual details, but under camouflage, this is one of many similar situations that came to light.

It was the case of one child who had a critical and destructive attitude, so much so that in whatever cabin she lived the morale dropped. I asked the parents to come into my office and talk the matter over. I had barely cited three instances when the father burst forth, "You needn't say any more. You have given me a perfect picture of myself. I ridicule and criticize every morning at the breakfast table just to amuse the children. I see clearly what I've done and I'll undo it. You will have no further cause to worry!" I thought afterwards that a humble



grown-up was a real asset to a child and that true greatness lay not in being right, but in being willing to acknowledge where one has been wrong.

As the parents and I found opportunity to get together over matters like this, and later straightened the problem out with the child, the change in her attitude was marked, and a very real enjoyment of camp resulted. Often the correcting of faults in a child required only bringing into the open the underlying causes, and the child's problems melted away like mist in the sunshine.



### III

## *Activities*



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## CHAPTER 13

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### *The Programme*

THE FUN and achievement of camp, the friendship, adventure and learning, depended to a large extent on the daily programme of activities.

The programme was carefully planned so as to give plenty of choice and sufficient free time, and to take into consideration the many suggestions and requests coming from counsellors and campers alike. The organization necessary for smooth running began in the city and ran through pre-camp days. The head of programme, co-operating with the director, worked closely with the heads of activities and tribes. The daily programme was in operation from Monday to Saturday and divided morning and afternoon into two periods each.

The over-all programme, which was a tentative schedule of special all-camp events, was blocked out for the whole summer, for various reasons. We wanted to avoid crowding in too many events at the end of July and the end of August; to help get the all-camp programme started on time, and to provide a variety of events. These events included land sports, water sports, demonstrations and camp fires, and special days. It was also necessary to have good spacing, some events in the morning or afternoon, some



all day, and some in the evening. Lastly, it was necessary to arrange that the campers be brought together as a unit sufficiently often for each to feel a part of the whole, and at the same time reserve enough time for tribal events.

The first day at camp was largely taken up with swimming and canoeing tests and an orientation programme for new campers. After that they had a fairly comprehensive idea of the various activities and the older campers, at least, could make their own choice concerning them. By the second day everything seemed to be running smoothly.

The heads of activities were responsible for their own special events—e.g., the head of waterfront was primarily responsible for the planning and running of meets and regattas, the head of campcraft for the campcraft rally. Other special days fell mainly into programme.

Occasionally the programme was laid aside for a Free Day, when all the counsellors were at their regular activities but there were no assigned periods. The campers came and went as they chose. Free days were usually preceded by buffet breakfasts.

Of course it was bound to rain sometimes, too, and the solution was another problem solved in pre-camp. The head of programme along with counsellors arranged rainy-day programmes which could be put to use at a moment's notice. They included interest groups; water safety for swimmers; general knowledge for canoeists; mending sails and racing rules and techniques for the sailors. In addition there was square dancing, stretch and swing, rubber boot hikes, ping-pong tournaments, and all sorts of other activities guaranteed to interest everyone. The play, of course, or at least the rehearsals for it, had to go on, but luckily the theatre had a roof. Our aim was to make rainy days interesting, and indeed campers sometimes hoped for rain because those days were such fun.





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